The Old Paths

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"What The Empty Tomb Means"

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Some 2000 years ago, Jesus gave His dear life as a sacrifice for the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). He was crucified between two thieves, cruelly mocked, spat upon, and cursed. When He died, He was laid in a new tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea (Mk. 15:43-47), there to await His resurrection on the third day. The account of Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, the other women, and the apostles finding Jesus' tomb empty is found in Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-11, Luke 24:1-12, and John 20:1-10. The women came to anoint Jesus' body, but found that the stone had been rolled away, and spoke to an angel who said that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Why study this? It is because the empty tomb that the women and apostles saw declares many lessons for us today. In talking to people about Christ, we find that many do not believe that Jesus is real (historically or otherwise). Others believe that He was a real MAN, but nothing more, and did not rise from the dead.

This empty tomb means something to Christians. It is important and necessary, and has great value to all those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. What does the empty tomb mean?

Death Is Conquered.

Jesus has become the *"firstfruits of them that slept"* (I Cor. 15:20). Jesus resurrected to *"proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles"* (Acts 26:23). Colossians 1:18 declares that Christ's resurrection gives Him the preeminence in all things. Hebrews 2:9 shows us that Christ tasted death for every man. Therefore, Christians have nothing to fear in death.

Jesus promised that death itself would not stop the church from coming into existence (Matt. 16:18). In declaring that death is conquered through Jesus' death we sometimes sing, "Up From The Grave He Arose" (Sacred Selections, #155; "Hymns For Worship", #174). This song reinforces our hope we have in death that others do not have.

In writing on the subject of death and the resurrection of all mankind, Paul said, *"For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (I Cor. 15:53-57).

Why not look into the tomb, and see the victory that Christ has given to all since He arose from the dead!

Salvation Belongs To All.

Before Christ, men could only labor to keep the Old Testament (Mosaic) Law. They offered animal sacrifices to atone for their sins, but this was not enough (Heb. 10:1-4). "Animal sacrifices could not atone because they were not of the same nature with those who sinned. They were not of sufficient value to make satisfaction for the affronts done to the justice and government of God." (The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, p. 162). Before Christ, the people had to keep certain feasts and rituals that no one could fully obey (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1). And at this time, only the Jews were considered God's covenant people (Gen. 17).

Seeing that Jesus gave His life, shed His blood, and arose from the dead, He offers salvation to everyone. Jesus says to all, *"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart: and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (Matt. 11:28-30). In Mark 16:15, Jesus instructed His apostles to *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* In Colossians 1:5-6, 23, we read that this command was carried out! Paul declared that *"every creature which is under heaven"* heard the gospel. Jesus wanted no one to be ignorant of His will, and neither should we.

Looking into the book of Acts, we see that the Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles were given the opportunity to hear God's word preached (Acts 2, 8, 10-11)! Peter declared, *"For the promise is for you, and for your children, and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself"* (Acts 2:39). This means everyone!

One last passage to consider is found in Romans 5:8. *"But God shows his love for us, in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* God's plan for salvation was

put in motion and fulfilled though we did nothing, and have done nothing to deserve it! Yet, as the empty tomb stands open, we know that everyone has the invitation to come and obey Jesus and have salvation just as we have it.

Life's Trials Are Worth It.

We may get run-down, and fed up with life at times, but remember what Jesus did for us. It is nothing strange, or new to suffer persecution in one form or another for Christ. The question is, how do we handle the inevitable?

While on this earth, Jesus made it clear that, *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours"* (Jn. 15:18-20). Paul said, *"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (II Tim. 3:12). Notice he did not say that there was a "good chance" for persecution, or that it "might" happen, but those who live godly SHALL suffer persecution.

Regardless of what others might think, the tragedy is not in the suffering of the persecution (I Pet. 4:16). The tragedy is if we are suffering these things, and Christ did not rise from the dead! Paul said that Jesus was seen by Peter, the twelve, over 500 brethren at one time, James, and himself after His resurrection (I Cor. 15:5-8). He then says that if Jesus did not rise from the dead the third day, then our preaching is vain, our faith is vain, the apostles are liars, we are yet in our sins, those already dead are perished, and we are of all men most miserable (I Cor. 15:12-19). How could we justify all of our labors and struggles if the tomb is not empty? Seeing that Jesus rose the third day, our sufferings are not in vain!

Jesus Told The Truth.

Throughout Jesus' preaching, He prophesied of His coming death, burial, and resurrection, and that He was (is) indeed the Son of God. A few passages that declare this are: Matthew 12:38-40; Matthew 16:21; John 8:24, 58-59; John 10:30-36; and John 18:36-37.

That empty tomb forever tells mankind that the Son of God walked this earth, told us the truth about all things, that He loves us and wants to save us!!

If we can believe that Jesus told us the truth on these things, why do we not believe Him on the other things He teaches in His word? There has been much dispute over certain parts of the Bible for many years. Obviously, Jesus did not teach two or more conflicting doctrines, but spoke the Truth consistently. Knowing this, and knowing that He told us the truth about His death, burial, and resurrection; why can we not believe His teachings on other subjects, i.e. The plan of salvation (Mk. 16:16), the organization and work of the church (Rom. 14:17), Hell being a reality (Matt. 24:33), and that not everyone will be in Heaven (Matt. 7:21-23)?

Jesus has told us the Truth; the empty tomb shows us this. He is the Son of God, and He has done everything possible to lead us to Heaven. The question is will we do those things He requires?

Conclusion

The stone wasn't rolled back so Jesus could escape the tomb. It was rolled back so we could look in!!! Have you looked with the eye of faith into that empty tomb? Do you understand what the empty tomb means? I pray that we might all come to a better understanding of what the empty tomb means to Christians and to the world.

Some Spiritual Thoughts...

"The Christian welcomes any challenge that sends him back to the Bible for a restudy of every practice to which he subscribes or doctrine he may teach."

"Indifference and negligence can rob a man of power essential to victory whether secular or spiritual."

~ Selected

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